

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([00:07](#)):

Hello and welcome to the Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast. The producers of this podcast would like to acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation Firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee, the Indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands. And now, introducing your hosts, Phil Arnold and Sandy Bigtree.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:31](#)):

Welcome everyone to Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast. My name is Phil Arnold. I'm faculty in religion and also in Native American Indigenous studies at Syracuse University, and the founding director of the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center at Onondaga Lake.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:49](#)):

And I'm Sandy Bigtree, a citizen of the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne. I'm on the board of the Indigenous Values Initiative. I was on the academic collaborative for the Skä•noñh Center. Welcome, we're so glad to have you here today, Matt.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:05](#)):

Yeah. Great to have you, Matt. With us today is Matthew Brody. I'm going to have you introduce yourself, Matt.

Matthew Boedy ([01:12](#)):

Sure. My name is Matthew Boedy. I'm a professor at the University of North Georgia. I teach in the English department, but my research focus and teaching focus is in rhetoric and composition. And I've written extensively about a group called Turning Point USA and have a book about them now out called The Seven Mountains Mandate: Exposing the Dangerous Plan to Christianize America and Destroy Democracy. I'm happy to be here.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:39](#)):

Wow, that's a lot. So talk about your book, talk about Turning Point USA, because I think it connects directly to our work in the Doctrine of Discovery. Thank you.

Matthew Boedy ([01:54](#)):

Yeah. So Turning Point is a massive sprawling organization, obviously founded by the late Charlie Kirk. Most people think of it as a college student organizing group. They have many chapters on many colleges, but they also have many chapters in high schools. In fact, they have more high school chapters than they do college chapters. But it is not just a young person group anymore. Really, since the pandemic, since they surged into ideology of Christian nationalism, they have been serving all ages and all demographics, mainly white evangelicals. But they have expanded into the seven areas, or the seven mountains, they have an arm for Turning Point in each of those seven cultural institutions.

([02:36](#)):

So it is a, when I say sprawling organization, it has a massive physical location in Arizona, but also, it is a nationwide movement that pushes dominionism, that pushes Christian supremacy, and then that pushes, of course, conservative political ideals, along with anything that relates to MAGA. Its budget, it's hard to figure out, actually, there's so many different arms, but Turning Point itself, Turning Point USA has a budget of about \$100 million. Separate is one of their arms, their political arm, called Turning

Point Action, which probably is \$50 million right now. That seems like a lot of money and they do a lot of things with all that money, that is they have money to burn on way different things.

(03:20):

So I started writing about Turning Point several years ago when they first became popular with a thing called the Professor Watchlist, which is their list of professors that they don't like and don't agree with, and I was put on that for writing an opinion piece against allowing concealed weapons on college campuses here in Georgia, which is now a law. And to be honest with you, I didn't know who the group was when they started [inaudible 00:03:45] and it's grown to several hundred now, and they use it in different ways to scare people and to watch people.

(03:54):

But they're known for more than just college organizing. They're known for, most recently, every year, they do an event down in Arizona, called AMFEST, or AmericaFest, where they train organizers and train people to knock on doors and they have a worship night, and they obviously have any type of speaker that you can think of in terms of names. But really what they're about is you might call them a grassroots organization, even though they're funded by big donors, but they affect a lot of different cultural institutions in our society.

Sandy Bigtree (04:24):

Matt, could you explain what the Five Mountain Mandate is?

Matthew Boedy (04:29):

Seven.

Sandy Bigtree (04:29):

I'm sorry.

Matthew Boedy (04:32):

We want to get the full encompassing group. So the title of the book comes from the areas of Turning Point in which they're involved in, but that mandate, these seven mountains, dates back to 1975. Really since the last 50 years, this ideal of dominionism has been circulated within charismatic Christian circles, but also beyond that. And the idea, of course, is that Christians would take back society, take it back from anti-Christian forces, from demonic forces, from forces that were secular, so they would take back society in these seven cultural institutions. And I always leave one off the list when I list them, so I'm going to read them from the table of contents.

Philip P. Arnold (05:12):

Good.

Matthew Boedy (05:15):

The mountain of education, the mountain of government, the mountain of religion, the mountain of family, the mountain of business, the mountain of media, and the mountain of entertainment. So these seven areas of our culture, of course, have many different things involved in it. But with Turning Point and the history of the Seven Mountains Mandate is not merely to produce a Christian parallel universe in all these areas, Christian schools, Christian movies, all those things, but to dethrone those that run those institutions or those isms and ideologies that control those institutions. So if you think about just,

for example, the mountain of government, it seems pretty easy to elect people to federal and state office that would follow this and implement policies that would flow from that. The other ones are a bit more subjective and vague in how they're doing it. But the idea, of course, is to dethrone the demonic forces, to throw them out, and install Christian businesses or Christian organizations or Christian leaders in these areas.

[\(06:16\)](#):

And I want to end by describing it, the Seven Mountains Mandate is a minority movement on purpose. It is not about convincing the majority of Americans to be Christians, it's not about evangelizing so we would have that. It is about inserting a minority to rule over the rest of us. And so, the idea that it destroys democracy, I think, is based upon that, but also the idea that they would be going after a majority rule in America by the minority. So that's really important to the Seven Mountains Mandate, because they see themselves as fighting and winning God's battle, so every time they lose and every time they fall back, it is really just the true believers keep going. And we see that in a lot of different areas.

[\(07:00\)](#):

But the Seven Mountains Mandate has been around for about 50 years. These list of seven came from Bill Bright and Campus Crusade [inaudible 00:07:08] Youth With A Mission, but over the years, it's changed, not the list itself, but the idea of how you go about winning this culture has changed. And I think that Charlie Kirk, as an heir to this, showed us the culture warrior part of it, that the culture war is not just to be fought and to win elections, but it is about taking back our culture for Christianity or for evangelical Christianity.

Sandy Bigtree [\(07:32\)](#):

It's quite a big shift from personal enlightenment or salvation.

Matthew Boedy [\(07:37\)](#):

Yes. And that's why I want to emphasize that it is not individual change, they're not going out to convince individuals to perhaps believe in the gospel or believe in their one area that they want to influence, it's an institutional change. And so, they look at institutional change as coming before individual change. They often speak of reformation before revival, that is they want to reform the culture and create a Christian consensus, and that might lead to revival, but they're very much interested in installing this minority power over these institutions.

Sandy Bigtree [\(08:08\)](#):

And as you say, that's a huge threat to democracy.

Matthew Boedy [\(08:13\)](#):

Yeah.

Philip P. Arnold [\(08:13\)](#):

Well, and I can appreciate your interest in rhetoric, because it always impressed me, I guess, that Charlie Kirk was somebody who wanted to go to universities, go to where young people would debate him. And with his murder, what do you think are the consequences to Turning Point right now?

Matthew Boedy [\(08:45\)](#):

Yeah, that's a tough one, and we've seen a lot of their doubling down certainly on Seven Mountains Mandate and doubling down on this faith and freedom rhetoric. I do think they're built to last. I don't think that they're going to disappear anytime soon. I think they're built to last because they have so many areas in which they can influence the culture, and if one subsides, they have all these other areas. And I think that we're still in the phase of people doing things for Charlie, whether winning the election, knocking on doors, starting chapters, that's still happening. And so, I do think, perhaps over the years, that may fade. But really, they've started to define themselves as a movement based upon one person.

[\(09:31\)](#):

So I do think they're built to last. They still are getting millions of dollars in donations, and they're still getting loads of interest from high school and college students. If you think about it, since they have high school and college chapters, a person could be under the influence of Turning Point for eight years, high school and college. What do you do then when they graduate college? Well, they can be inserted into a Turning Point church chapter. So they have a lot of ways in which they keep their pipeline going.

[\(09:57\)](#):

So after Charlie's assassination, I do think that Turning Point introduced themselves to a lot of new people at that memorial service, which to me was a very clear Christian nationalism memorial service. But it gave a lot of people a clear picture of what it is they do and what Charlie stood for, and I think that many people were attracted to that. So I think that they're built to last, I think they're going to last. They're certainly going to play a big role in the next year in terms of elections, but they do way more than that now. So I think that over the years, they'll continue to double down on what it is they do.

Philip P. Arnold [\(10:37\)](#):

I mean, there's so many comments and questions that I have. I'm reflecting on a class I taught called Religion and White Supremacy last semester, and the students were very concerned about Charlie Kirk's murder. I mean, I must admit, I didn't know who Charlie Kirk was until the news started covering him like crazy. I'd heard him occasionally on a YouTube or something like that, but really hadn't followed this at all. But the students all knew who he was, they all knew. And this is in a blue state, they're active in all these college campuses and everything. So obviously, that was a wake-up call for me, that the students were very concerned about this, and now we have a lot of conversations about what kind of Christianity are we talking about.

[\(11:48\)](#):

It seems like, even in your conversation just now, there seems to be a struggle going right now about what is Christianity, what is the nature of it, what is its theology. I see definitely different politicians, I'm thinking of, what is it, James Talarico in Texas, who's very openly liberal in his theology and pushes back against the kind of Christian nationalism that we're talking about. There are others who espouse, of course, MAGA sort of Christianity. But the students are... Because many of them are Christians, many of them are athletes and things, they espouse a certain kind of Christianity, but they don't recognize this as Christianity oftentimes. You know what I'm saying? So Christian nationalism is a certain kind of form of Christianity, where others are espousing a different Christianity, and I ask them, "Well, will the real Christianity please stand up?"

Sandy Bigtree [\(13:08\)](#):

Well, coming from an Indigenous perspective, I might add, you had mentioned your class, which really helps them understand the dilemma we're facing now with Christian nationalism, is teaching them about the doctrines of Christian discovery. Because being Indigenous, we are well aware that we were

attacked, our systems of identity were attacked from day one. They infiltrated our clan system. The Christians switched us from a matrilineal society to a patriarchy and that was ruled by the husband. Our women were forced to marry men and take a vow of subservience. It was already being viewed as a system in how to supplant a new system to control Indigenous people in these lands.

(14:00):

This is why we call our podcast Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery, because that doctrine affected every aspect of who we are, it affected our family, the way we practiced rituals, how we ate, how we related to our land, how our rivers were rerouted for industry. I mean, it's very complex, and your talking about these seven mountains can relate to that. We better start talking about Christianity and these powers trying to control and dominate every aspect of our existence, because it's happening right here and you've articulated this.

Matthew Boedy (14:41):

Yeah. I think that Turning Point's very good at taking, we'll say, complex theology or high-minded theology and putting it in a bumper sticker format, putting it in talking points that students, who recognize Christianity but don't necessarily get beyond the basics, and then being a part of that group, saying, "I agree with this." So if you think about writing the book about Genesis 1 and the verses about [inaudible 00:15:09] the Seven Mountains Mandate, including Charlie Kirk and Turning Point, take that from a take care of creation or use up creation, however you want to see that, into a cultural domain, they reinterpret that as not just taking care of creation but taking care of culture.

(15:28):

And they add to that a particular verse in Jeremiah that Charlie Kirk repeats a lot that he's got from other people, and I always forget the reference, but I think it's Jeremiah 29, when he says, "Seek the prosperity of your city, and when your city prospers, you too will prosper." What Charlie does is replace the word city with nation, and this was part of the exiles and Jeremiah was talking about people who were living in exile, so it wasn't necessarily the definition of nation that they had now. But what Charlie does, by replacing the word city with nation, is making, of course, nationalism, suggesting that though Christians whom he was speaking to... Who for a long time evangelicals were not involved in politics or don't think they should be involved or don't mix their religion and politics in the way that he does, he's trying to convince them to do that, and by replacing that word, he's speaking directly to that audience.

(16:20):

And I think that resonates very... Everybody remembers or still recalls Bible verses because you memorize them, and remembering that one thing so encapsulates what Turning Point has set out to do, and they do that well, they train their people well and sit down and have these talking points, and get them to repeat them so much, like Bible verses, that they can go out and talk to other people. I just remember, Turning Point has had a chapter at my school on and off for several years now, they were tabling one particular semester and I walked out to talk with them, and they had no idea who I was, which is really weird because I was on their Professor Watchlist. And I was talking to the person tabling, and I was trying to engage her in a conversation, but she kept giving me the talking points and trying to move on to the next person, and it was just very clear that they wanted to say these few things, and then these few things would convince a bunch of people, and then they would move on, but they weren't really interested in that.

(17:20):

And I say that because that's what Charlie does at these debates, he's very good... I mean, no doubt, he's very good at what he does, but I would not classify this as some sort of debate. He frames it has,

"Prove me wrong." He's never proven wrong because of the way in which he limits or constrains or changes the question or jumps in. So there's a reason why his fans like him, and there's a reason why there's a bunch of videos of people looking stupid, because Turning Point does that with their campus events.

Philip P. Arnold ([17:48](#)):

Yeah. So it's very thin kind of argument style, or it sounds very Hebrew Bible, we'll say, or Old Testament framework.

Matthew Boedy ([17:57](#)):

Yeah. They do love their Proverbs and that short statement.

Philip P. Arnold ([18:01](#)):

Yeah. Well, also, that was used by the Pilgrims and others to justify the taking of land and the extermination of Native people, so yeah, it's not surprising that those become the operative Bible verses that are utilized. But I think once you start poking at this theologically, once you start poking at it and looking at what is Christianity, I think that becomes a way to deflate the whole theological framework, in a way.

Matthew Boedy ([18:40](#)):

Yeah. No, no. I think that there's still a divide between the type of Christians that Turning Point attracts and we'll say Reform evangelicals. They're not exactly one-to-one ratio, but I think the people that spend way more time in their Bible and in their Sunday school and reading other people, they're not as attracted to Turning Point and Christian nationalism. But that said, they're both in the MAGA camp, so they're getting the same feeds from Fox News and other places, so it's very hard to separate the theology from the politics.

([19:14](#)):

And I've done several presentations now, and people always ask me that question, "How do I speak to my MAGA Christian neighbor or my MAGA Christian family member? They just don't want to listen." And as a rhetoric professor, I really don't have an answer either. It takes multiple conversations, and sometimes there's just no way around it. But it is a theology they've built up, and I wouldn't call it complex, but they provide many avenues for people to get into it that are very easy and much like Bible verses being remembered.

Philip P. Arnold ([19:45](#)):

Yeah. So I have, again, several questions. So can you dig into the funding for us a little bit? I mean, it's very shady, but it's not well-meaning Christian people that are backing Turning Point to \$150 million, right?

Matthew Boedy ([20:13](#)):

No. They currently have big donors, and that's hard to know who exactly it is, because their tax records are secret. But every now and then, we get some open windows. I mean, one of the original donors was a guy from Montana who gave Charlie his initial seed money. But they have some really good... Really good. Really high-profile backers. The Koch brothers are certainly... Their sprawling network does that. I

mean, they just got a donation from \$10 million from a woman who runs a conglomerate business that I'd never heard of to rename their building for her.

Philip P. Arnold ([20:45](#)):

Wow,

Matthew Boedy ([20:46](#)):

But they do a lot, obviously, to get these big donors. But I do want to point out, when I say it's grassroots, they do have the big donors, but there are plenty of people that will donate \$25 or \$10 or whatever to buy a hat or buy Turning Point merchandise, so they have both. And really, it's very strange to see merchandise now after Charlie Kirk's death, but they're selling merchandise now that reflect him. They have the Freedom T-shirt that he was killed in, they have hoodies that say Faith over Tyranny or No Tyrants hoodies. So there's a lot of things that they do to collect the individual person, but they're really good at, of course, those big donors.

([21:29](#)):

And I would say that that big money allows them to go after the little person. So it's hard to know what a total amount of money they're making, but I will say, if you just think about Charlie Kirk himself, he was famous for giving up his Turning Point salary. He made maybe \$350,000 a year from Turning Point itself, but he had millions of dollars in all these other places, and that's just his money, Turning Point is much bigger than just him. So it is a sprawling economic powerhouse.

Philip P. Arnold ([21:59](#)):

It's a money-making operation. And as you point out, this is part of the prosperity gospel line, that is... I mean, that way of thinking spans the New Age world. I remember my grandmother sending money. The prosperity gospel has been around for a long time, and I think they're all feeding off that trough, right?

Matthew Boedy ([22:35](#)):

No, yeah. So it's fascinating to read histories of prosperity gospel and then to connect it to this institutional change movement, is that the prosperity gospel is about the individual, if I believe enough, I will be wealthy. You add the national part to that, if I become an entrepreneur, if I start a business, God will bless me and my nation. And the initial selling point for the Seven Mountains Mandate from Bill Bright was to go into Christian businessmen usually and say, "You've been really successful at this business part. Let's use your money and your expertise for God's Kingdom." I mean, that is the move from prosperity gospel to prosperity institutionalism or whatever. But it's clear that they're banking on this idea that if we're all successful, God will bless us financially. So the more money they get, it is a sign of God's blessing, and that leads to a national blessing. And then, there's some people in the Seven Mountains Mandate that do talk about a national blessing, that if capitalism runs right, we'll all be blessed.

Philip P. Arnold ([23:41](#)):

Wow. It's all around a monetary framework. So you've pointed out some fissures between evangelicals, for example, and Turning Point, and I'm wondering about others within the MAGA Christian world. One of the people we talked about in my class was Pete Hegseth and his Dominion Theology, wearing crusader tattoos on his body, that sort of thing. The inspiration is the Crusades, of course, which is the backstory for the Doctrine of Discovery. The whole age of discovery is fueled by the perceived Muslim

threat and really the failure of the Crusades in the 13th century. So I'm wondering, can you articulate some of the fissures that we might be seeing in these different kinds of movements? Are, for example, the crusader, I can't remember the name, the group, the crusading Christian group that Hegseth is part of, is that distinct from the dominion theological framework or the Turning Point people?

Matthew Boedy ([25:11](#)):

I do think they're all kind of melded together. Doug Wilson is the patriarch of that movement that Pete Hegseth is a part of, his sprawling organizations in Idaho. Doug Wilson has appeared with Charlie Kirk at different events, they're now partnering together on a series of schools, so they're definitely tied in together.

Philip P. Arnold ([25:33](#)):

I see.

Matthew Boedy ([25:34](#)):

I do think that these different streams of different, we'll say again, organizations or influencers, like Doug Wilson and Charlie Kirk and others, come together when they're allied together, and they don't seem to have any differences so they will work together. I think that the thing that may keep them apart or make them sink is they each want their own success, they each want their own lane.

Philip P. Arnold ([26:00](#)):

Right. It's a zero-sum game, they're all making their own money, right?

Matthew Boedy ([26:04](#)):

Right. So yeah, they're going to partner together. But Doug Wilson still wants his thing in Idaho and he's opened his new church in D.C. now. So they want to work off each other's brands, because that's what it is now, and go much higher. I think also, with the Dominion Theology, the differences in theology, if there are, don't matter. I mean, some of them are post-millennials, some of them are pre-millennials, some of them are in the middle, whatever, but they all have the same goal, to change this culture, either to bring on the rapture and the persecution or to bring back Jesus in some sort of glory. They've now decided that we have the same goal, so we can work together. I mean, back in the '70s and '80s, they didn't often come together because of that distinct difference, but the differences have seemed to have faded. So whatever you think of Doug Wilson, he is in line with Turning Point as far as it goes.

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([26:59](#)):

Do you need help catching up on today's topic or do you want to learn more about the resources mentioned? If so, please check our website at podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org for more information. And if you like this episode, review it on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts. And now, back to the conversation.

Philip P. Arnold ([27:17](#)):

I don't know quite how to ask this question. Since you're on the list, and we know others that are on the list, does it worry you?

Matthew Boedy ([27:32](#)):

It didn't when it came out?

Philip P. Arnold ([27:32](#)):

How does it influence your life?

Matthew Boedy ([27:36](#)):

It didn't when it came out, because nobody knew who they were. And writing the book, I just went back and looked at... They've kept an extensive profile on me, and I was not aware of that until I did a podcast in Arizona with a group, and they had mentioned to me that Turning Point had signed up for the podcast. They could tell because of the email addresses. And I was like, "That's odd. Why are they caring what I say on a podcast?" They have updated their website, my profile, I think the last update was in 2024, but they constantly add things that I've said.

([28:12](#)):

It didn't bother me before. I will say, obviously, with the killing and assassination of Charlie Kirk, I did think for a minute about the attention that would come. A lot did. It's certainly faded since then. But I think the watchlist is important to Turning Point, but because of all the areas that they've now gone into, it's become a minor thing to them. They still do and have partners that do these viral videos of professors doing stuff and saying stuff in class or assignments they don't like, and they still do that, but the watchlist has become less important to them because they have all these other things. Now, that doesn't mean that, of course, they aren't doing things, like they have a school board watchlist now, which is school boards and school board members they don't like, so they're doing things about lists and watching. But particularly I have not had any, other than some terrible emails, have not had any negative impact.

([29:08](#)):

Now, that said, I'm a white dude in Georgia who teaches at a school that very people have ever heard of. But I have heard stories of other people having it much worse, and especially if you get targeted by a group [inaudible 00:29:20] their partner online, which our school was back in October. The hurricane can last probably a week of just terrible things that you get and you might need to take down your profile and things like that, so there's always a fear of that. But I think that, for whatever reason, Turning Point is less than the Professor Watchlist, and oddly, while I did say that they've updated their profile on me, they have not targeted me since the book came out, which is really strange, because-

Philip P. Arnold ([29:54](#)):

That is strange.

Matthew Boedy ([29:55](#)):

... it has gotten a lot of attention, obviously, because of Charlie Kirk's death. I mean, they could be busy, obviously, with other things. But my family was very concerned about that when it first happened. And I think that they have ignored me mainly because the book is so, I don't know, right on. There's nothing to disagree with or there's no [inaudible 00:30:16] in it. It would take a lot to debunk it, and they're not really into doing that much work.

Philip P. Arnold ([30:22](#)):

Wow.

Sandy Bigtree ([30:22](#)):

Wow.

Philip P. Arnold ([30:23](#)):

So Adam, our producer just reminded me that Chandra Mohanty, our friend and colleague here at Syracuse University, is one of the people on the list, and she gets harassed on a regular basis. Why colleges and universities, why is that seen as particularly threatening to Turning Point's framework, and how is it expressing itself or how has it affected academics working at other colleges and universities?

Matthew Boedy ([31:04](#)):

Turning Point's not the first to come up with a list of professors they hate. Obviously, they based it upon a guy named David Horowitz's list of the 100 worst professors in America that came out in the early 2000s, and David Horowitz still runs his organization in Colorado and he's the person that introduced Charlie to a lot of different people. So higher education being a target is not new. But I think what Turning Point... Obviously, the social media has helped Turning Point spread its thing.

([31:30](#)):

But I think there are two reasons why Turning Point attacks colleges and universities. One, it's easy to do, not so much because we're terrible, but because this idea of free speech and being an open campus and inviting people in and you can say anything you want here, there's opportunities for them to do that. And when I say Charlie Kirk is an advocate for free speech, what I mean is he uses free speech, I don't think he's interested in everybody having free speech. So we're a soft target in that regard.

([32:00](#)):

But I also think that there is a bigger movement, obviously, outside of Turning Point against higher education because of the ways in which it constantly challenges our thinking. In any type of class, that should happen. You're not just given new information, information you didn't know, but also you're asking to rethink conceptually things that you may hold dear. And I think that attacks upon that really have helped Turning Point, because they're not just saying it's a liberal indoctrination camp, they're not just saying you should defund them, they're saying that they're a evil kind of cancer. Charlie's famous phrase is, "Whatever happens on college campuses does not stay there." So they see this as a center of a spreading disease, and that has just turned up the rhetoric against college and university.

([32:54](#)):

If you can say our tuition is too high, you can say I don't do a great job, you can say I waste my time on classes I don't care about, those are all things we could debate, but I can't come back to somebody who thinks that this is a spreading disease of evil, it's really hard to convince someone of that. So how that trickles down to students, of course, they might not actually believe that, but they'll then say, "Well, why am I bothering with your class? All I want is my classes." So you can see that no matter how much they raise a rhetoric, it always has an impact down the pipeline. As you mentioned, there are plenty of students who are supporters of Charlie Kirk, and sometimes they do take it themselves to videotape people or to turn in people's assignments to different websites. So they are trained to look for the things they want to find.

Philip P. Arnold ([33:44](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I hadn't intended to talk about this, but it is an assault, or a different kind of an assault, on the humanities. Humanities is under the gun, certainly at our university and other universities, for a variety of reasons. But this is another assault in some ways.

Matthew Boedy ([34:10](#)):

No, yeah, yeah. Charlie's famous for saying that the humanities are a waste of time in terms of classes, and yet he spent most of his 20s reading great books that were part of humanities education. So it's really fascinating to see that... Really, you need a good teacher when you read books, because if you read them for just you, you'll come out with you at the end [inaudible 00:34:37].

Philip P. Arnold ([34:39](#)):

Really well said. Wow. So how do you think that we should push back against these cultural assaults, in some ways? I mean, for lovers of democracy, can you summarize what you think we ought to be doing, as a society, as academics, as concerned citizens?

Matthew Boedy ([35:17](#)):

I was writing the book, and it's a pretty negative portrayal of this-

Philip P. Arnold ([35:21](#)):

Absolutely.

Matthew Boedy ([35:22](#)):

... plan to Christianize America.

Philip P. Arnold ([35:23](#)):

It's a wake-up, right? Yeah.

Matthew Boedy ([35:25](#)):

Yeah, yeah. And I was like, "This is bad. I've got to provide some sort of positive hope." So at the end of each chapter, I tried to do a couple paragraphs on what is it supposed to look like in these areas if we were to live in a healthy democracy. I'm certainly not an expert in political science. I'm just a regular voter, like anybody else, trying to imagine what these things would look like if you did not have these attacks. And I think that the answer to a minority movement, it has to be a majority movement. What that majority movement entails, I think, has to be around the ideals that would bring us all together, and those are democratic ideals and free speech and freedom of religion and education. Those things do resonate with still lots of people.

([36:15](#)):

That said, I think that because they're going after institutions and not just individuals... And academic freedom is a great example. Academic freedom used to be that the government would target an individual professor or fire them because they didn't like what they wrote or said. Now, academic freedom is being fought at the institutional level, because you have state legislators passing laws and policies by university systems that affect masses amount of people, not the individual professor, like somebody asked, "Has your university pushed back against your writing?" Well, no, because they don't really care. One person does not disrupt their institutional power. And I think that throughout the history, we've seen these institutional changes happen over time, sometimes more violent than others, but the idea was they always go after the institutions. And the institutions were changed, perhaps one by one or over a series of time.

([37:14](#)):

But I think that the answer to that is sadly though a long game back to the institutions, this is not going to be a quick fix. If you think about, again, when Donald Trump leaves the political scene, when perhaps MAGA leaves the scene, Turning Point is setting itself up to be the inheritor of that. They're not going away anytime soon, so that means all the people that they've affected are not going away anytime soon. So yes, you have to outvote them to become a majority. But you also have to think about institutionally how you can protect institutions from these ideological takeovers, and that requires not doing what they're doing. It requires not being anti-democratic, it means selling the messy democracy discussions as well.

[\(38:02\)](#):

But also, it means that promoting the idea of institutions, promoting the good of institutions, not just the government, but all these other institutions as being not just good for the common society. We think about education being for the common good or for the public good. That hasn't, we'll say, caught on a lot [inaudible 00:38:19] because it seems vague to many people, it doesn't affect them. So you need really to have people part of a movement that they can identify with, which is what Turning Point is doing, and have that movement based upon ideals that we all share. That is a much longer book that I don't have time to write or an expertise in. But I would say that if they're going after institutions, your answer has to be institutional.

Philip P. Arnold [\(38:43\)](#):

Yeah, interesting, yeah. Ironically, particularly the academic study of religion, which I'm committed to, has been under assault for a variety of reasons, and we could talk about that. But we have a critical analysis of the phenomenon of religion, it's not advocating for a particular religion or whatever. But ironically, what's happening today in the country is making our classes much more popular. People are really wondering what is going on. And I tell my students, I've told them for 30 years, I've said, "If you don't know about religion, you just don't know what's going on in the country, you don't know what's going on in the world." Just a basic informational level, a basic knowledge of religion helps you to interpret what's going on.

[\(39:47\)](#):

So again, ironically, it's helping make the case for the humanities, in some way, certainly for the academic study of religion, and that's what we find in our work in the Doctrine of Discovery. I mean, it's this many tentacled phenomenon. We talk to lawyers, we talk to environmentalists, we've talked to a variety of Indigenous activists from around the world. It's something that has helped students and ourselves really to give us a framework on how we can understand what's happening. And likewise, the more light you shed on these kinds of phenomena, the better off we are.

Sandy Bigtree [\(40:56\)](#):

Particularly how religion was used as a weapon in coming into this continent, it was so incredibly violent and was the means by which it justified the taking of Native lands, the rerouting of waters, the massacre of Indigenous peoples. It's been glossed over. And then, we're taught the country's all about freedom and freedom of religion and all of this stuff, but meanwhile, this is the backdrop of what's really happening. When they came into this continent, most may have come thinking they're going to build a Christian country, but they saw these civilizations that were living in peace and that there was a different way of relating to the world around them, and so real effort was to squash those cultures and silence them.

[\(41:59\)](#):

And yet, a lot of this message still got out. I mean, there were Indigenous speakers in the late 17th century going to Europe and speaking about what true freedom is about, what equality is really about. And there are books being written right now that are attributing these Indigenous orders having inspired the Enlightenment thinkers in France during that period, because these speakers were known, written about for centuries, and they preceded all the major Enlightenment writers of the time. Well, the whole-

Philip P. Arnold ([42:42](#)):

And impacted the French Revolution. So the irony here is that the Haudenosaunee, we're in the heartland of the Haudenosaunee, or the Iroquois, and they have been directly... Well, they've been thanked by the United States-

Sandy Bigtree ([43:02](#)):

Right, and acknowledged.

Philip P. Arnold ([43:03](#)):

... in 1987, as having an impact on the development of Western democracy. So it's ironic that on the one hand, these Christian efforts to demolish democracy, on one hand, also benefit from these Indigenous roots, in some ways.

Sandy Bigtree ([43:27](#)):

Right, a different way of looking at the world. The whole notion of Christianity, it's all built around this dichotomy of good over evil. It's war. War is at the very basis of this theology, and if it's indeed an extension of the Roman Empire, which many scholars do believe, it was used by the Romans, then it explains warfare and domination in the world and how the Bible was written.

Philip P. Arnold ([43:58](#)):

Adam-

Matthew Boedy ([44:03](#)):

Humanities, last fall, I wrote a blog post as a call to put democracy on the syllabus, and I didn't just mean people that teach in political science or teach in rhetoric, that every discipline to try to put democracy on the syllabus, because obviously the election was coming up and we didn't want [inaudible 00:44:20] person to win. And I think that with the 250th anniversary of America coming up, we've already seen how the Trump administration is telling our history. We also need to have that type of thing, again, campus-wide. It can't just be the people in your area or my area, because honestly, very few people take our classes, even though they're popular. But also, I think that we need to convince other people that their work in one area matters to democracy, it is not a separate... I get a lot of professors who live separate lives there, they tend to just live in their academic silo and not affect everything else, but that's a tough road.

Philip P. Arnold ([45:02](#)):

Yeah. So I'm going to let Adam jump in here with a question or a comment.

Adam DJ Brett ([45:10](#)):

Thank you so much. So I want Phil and Sandy to talk about the work that they've been doing in the UK around the 250th there, how that's so different then what's happening here in the US, and then I want to shift directions and I have a follow-up question.

Philip P. Arnold ([45:35](#)):

Yeah, no. So in May of this year, there's going to be an exhibit at the London National Archives called Revolution 250: The Making of the USA. It sounds rather benign. They have millions of documents in their National Archives, over a thousand years of history, but they wanted to do an exhibit on this. We've befriended people there over the last few years, and we were interviewed on an extensive, over about three and a half hours-

Sandy Bigtree ([46:18](#)):

Three and a half hour interview.

Philip P. Arnold ([46:19](#)):

... to talk about the Haudenosaunee influence on Western democracy. So the British, who have a very different view of Revolution 250, they're very interested in these Indigenous roots, as were the French before the French Revolution and all that. So democracy, we need... And this is just celebrating what you just mentioned, Matthew, is that we need to be discussing democracy, we need to be discussing its origins. It's not just the Greeks or the British, it's a many faceted thing. And one of the failings, I think, in education has been civics, the disappearance of civics. I got it in high school, but I don't think we teach it anymore. Adam?

Sandy Bigtree ([47:28](#)):

But a big part is the recording of history. The British were telling one story of this interaction with the Haudenosaunee. We were all being taught that same narrative. And yet, when you look at the primary texts, they're very conflicting, because the history they're writing are the Native people they manipulated through Christianity to pose as being war chiefs and whatnot. Those were titles assigned to these individuals by the British. And then, you have the peacemakers, the Haudenosaunee, and you have those documents and those accounts of their nationhood of being peacemakers. And they frankly, in England, could not interpret these conflicting primary sources, they didn't know where to even begin, so we were able to help them with that, to show it was your manipulating in history, these forces and recording this history. And then, some of our researchers are Irish and they'd go, "Wow, they did that to the Irish, they did that to us." And so, it's clarifying some of the histories now in the empire there. So I think this is going to crack open a lot.

Philip P. Arnold ([48:42](#)):

Of course, nothing like that is happening here in the US. They're interested, but nobody here is.

Adam DJ Brett ([48:51](#)):

Thank you for that, I agree. This is such an important piece. At the 250th anniversary of America, I feel both not wanting to throw a party and more a funeral, but also not wanting to throw the funeral. And so, shifting directions, Matt, I was wondering, can you help us understand, one, is there a difference between Dominion Theology and the Seven Mountain Mandate? And two, can you connect seven mountain and dominion to the larger history of Christendom that we see unfolding in Europe and the US?

Matthew Boedy ([49:37](#)):

I don't see a difference between Dominion Theology and Seven Mountains Mandate. I think that dominionism is a term made up by academics, a pretty good one. But at the same time, it was trying to describe this idea that they were taking back dominion, and what involved in that theology, I think, translates very directly into the Seven Mountains Mandate. If you think of theology, again, as a conceptual framework, the Seven Mountains Mandate is a strategy for applying that, much like I call Seven Mountains a strategy for Christian nationalism, again, a framework for doing that. So I don't see a difference between the two.

([50:14](#)):

I do think, of course, that Western civilization plays a key role in the Seven Mountains Mandate, because you are not just trying to save America, you're also trying to save Western civilization, which means, of course, that it needs saving or that it's somehow died. And they often point to the secularization of Europe, and they don't want that to happen in America. And the idea of saving Western civilization, which is something Charlie Kirk mentions a lot, goes back further into the '70s, I think, when people were talking about the roles of education, primarily primary and secondary education, and how that was changing. To them, it was losing their Christian influence and saying the pledge every day to a more secularized influence.

([50:55](#)):

I remember exactly reading a chapter in Bill Bright's book, a chapter about education. He tried to trace this secularization back to some British guy, I forget his name, that came over to America to give education, somebody that taught Horace Mann, I forget the guy that taught him. But the idea was that there was this line they could trace back, and at some point, Christendom lost its power, its influence, and we need to get that back. Now, when that was in America, again, they came up with this list in 1975 because they were responding to things that happened in the '60s. But at the same time, this responding to keeps going back and back until, I don't know, I don't know when it started, because they believed that America was founded as a Christian nation, so it didn't start there. So at some point, Western civilization was lost, and we need to return to its origins. But also, we need to reshape its future so it matches something that can't be lost again.

([51:53](#)):

And so, the person who studies rhetoric from Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, what they're describing as Western civilization is not the same thing that I would do. So it's always about these myths, as you point out, the manipulation of history. So it's kind of odd to see the same thing repeated again every decade or every hundred years. But at the same time, when it's repeated, it's changed slightly. So Charlie Kirk's version of the Seven Mountains Mandate is different than Bill Bright, even though you could draw a line back to it.

Adam DJ Brett ([52:24](#)):

Thank you so much. That really excites me, because as a historian of religion, who trained with Phil and learned so much from Sandy, myths are so fascinating to the history of the world and they're so important to history of religions. And I really appreciate what you just highlighted, that this whole Make America Great Again, this whole Seven Mountains Mandate, is mythic, because there's no point that they want to return to, and if you keep pushing, it can be anywhere from the world being created, dinosaurs being put here to test us, Genesis 128, the 1970s, it becomes a-

Matthew Boedy ([53:00](#)):

Dinosaurs put here to test us, I haven't heard that one before.

Adam DJ Brett ([53:06](#)):

I grew up attending a rather fundamentalist school for high school, not of my own choosing, and that was one of the ones we got there.

Matthew Boedy ([53:15](#)):

Okay.

Adam DJ Brett ([53:18](#)):

So I want Phil to chime in about how these mythic etiologies function socially, what people get out.

Philip P. Arnold ([53:30](#)):

Yeah. So I think we could probably wrap it up there, Adam. I'd just like for you to once again plug your book, Matt-

Matthew Boedy ([53:48](#)):

Okay, sure.

Philip P. Arnold ([53:49](#)):

... and tell us a little more about it. I understand it's doing very well. So why don't you just plug it once more, and then we'll be out.

Matthew Boedy ([54:00](#)):

Sure. The Seven Mountains Mandate is published by Westminster John Knox Press, which I would be disheartened not to mention that, they took me on with having no previous public writing. And the book is about the Seven Mountains Mandate, Charlie Kirk plays a central role. And I will say that in writing the book, we wanted to make Charlie Kirk a central character, because he is, but also, I wanted to make the mandate a central character. So I tell the story of how we got from the list to a mandate to Charlie Kirk, and that comes across in every chapter, there's a chapter on each of the mountains.

([54:32](#)):

It was published with a religious publisher, and they told me when they got the proposal, even they had never heard of the Seven Mountains, and they're a Presbyterian PCUSA publisher. So you can see, it's not as well-known as people think. But this idea of Christian nationalism, I think, is getting more attention. And yes, it certainly has sold lots of copies and many people are discovering it. But I will say that they've done a great job, Westminster, as marketing. I've done several podcasts and they're selling at a booksellers' convention. And so, it's interesting to always ask people had they ever heard of Charlie Kirk before his death, and I always get maybe a third of the room, maybe a quarter of the room, to raise their hand yes. So I do think he's still an unknown quantity out there, and I think this book, if you want more information about him, is a good thing to go to.

Sandy Bigtree ([55:24](#)):

Matt, do you have a discount code you could offer?

Matthew Boedy ([55:28](#)):

I did. I think it's expired now, because it was just for the first month of it being on there. But actually, it is discounted on Amazon right now, like \$3 or \$4, from the list price of \$25, and the Amazon e-reader is like \$16. And in March, the audiobook is coming out, if you guys want to wait on that.

Philip P. Arnold ([55:53](#)):

Well, congratulations. It's really a very important intervention, I'll say, in the religion world today, and I know you don't come from our world, but it's a very important contribution. So thank you, Matthew Boedy, and I appreciate your willingness to be on our podcast.

Sandy Bigtree ([56:16](#)):

Yes, thank you.

Matthew Boedy ([56:17](#)):

Sure. Happy to be here.

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([56:20](#)):

The producers of this podcast were Adam DJ Brett and Jordan Loewen-Colón. Our intro and outro is Social Dancing Music by Oris Edwards and Regis Cook. This podcast is funded in collaboration with the Henry Luce Foundation, Syracuse University and Hendricks Chapel, and the Indigenous Values Initiative. If you liked this episode, please check out our website and make sure to subscribe.